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April 2011

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Sunday Shopper

Resurrection Reminder
Outside the Tomb



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A FOOD PANTRY.



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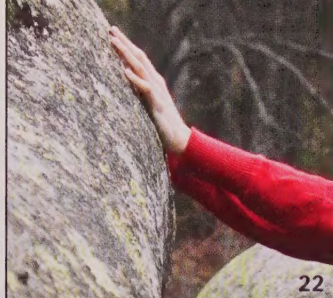
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AN EASTER PEOPLE

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 3 APRIL 2011

Sometimes we need healing and renewal to experience the joy of our new life in Christ.

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VOICES

Resurrection Life

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

Have you ever had a friend who you thought was lovely and smart but who referred to herself as plain or dumb or boring? I have. It made me sad to see someone with so many gifts who felt unworthy, discouraged, and stuck. What happened? Messages conveyed to her by adults during her childhood? Being teased by kids at school? Some failure or embarrassment she was never able to shake off?

In the Bible study this month, the writers focus on the resurrection story in Mark 16:1-8. Like the women who came to the tomb worried about how they were going to move the stone, we sometimes find that barriers prevent us from experiencing the new life that God intends. This session explores some obstacles to resurrection in our lives and how our faith communities can help us.

What kind of things might be a barrier to our experience of resurrection? Addiction, depression, financial worries, job loss, grief, chronic illness, anxiety, childhood abuse, divorce, ... whatever it is that holds you back, erodes your self-worth, and robs you of hope.

Often we think it's up to us to move the huge stone by ourselves. We think that if only we could be stronger or work harder, we'd push our way out and then we'd be free. But in "Outside the Tomb," Pastor Brooke Petersen writes, "When it comes to experiencing the power of God to make all things new, it doesn't depend on us at all. We don't try to raise Jesus from the dead by our own power because God has already done it."

In "Nothing Can Separate Us," Daryce Hoff Nolan shares the story of a painful loss in her life—her beloved job as a music teacher ends when a school program is cut. Although this event is a difficult barrier in her life, she reminds us that "God gets the last word, and it is resurrection."

Sue Edison-Swift makes the connection between resurrection life and the journey of a caterpillar to its final incarnation: "When you look up and see a butterfly on the wing, remember the women who looked up to see 'the stone which was very large, had already been rolled back' (Mark 16:4)."

For some of us, keeping the sabbath is a way we experience the new life we have in Christ. Every Sunday reminds us of the Easter miracle. In "Sunday Shopper" Kathleen Kastilahn tells what she learned when she asked Lutheran women about how they felt about shopping on Sunday. The discussion quickly turned to how they try to make sabbath time in their busy lives. We are reminded that we regularly need to make space in our week to slow down, connect with God, and be renewed.

Finally, Pastor Maggie Rourk challenges us to live an Easter life: "In infinite goodness and mercy, our Lord blesses us with a call to resurrection life now A gift is meant to be used and enjoyed, so let's get on with it!"

May the blessings of Easter bring you joy on your journey. 🌸

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You may write to her at LWT@elca.org.



GIVE US THIS DAY

Come as You Are

Mary Mortimore Dossin

Our local newspaper

runs a column called "Speakout." People can send in comments about anything—and be published without their names attached. I use items in it to demonstrate faulty logic to my college writing classes, although occasionally the comments are perceptive and wise.

Last summer a hot topic was what people wear to church. Someone who was tired of seeing shorts, tank tops, and flip flops on Sunday morning started the comments, and the topic continued to raise ire for weeks. Opinions ranged from "God wants you there whatever you wear" to "We must show as much respect to God as we do to an important client we are meeting for dinner."

I thought of this the other day when I read a thought-provoking devotion about prayer. It posed the question: Does God want to hear from us only when we can dress up our thoughts in our Sunday best of eloquent words and fine-sounding phrases? The devotion's author gave a resounding "NO." God wants to hear our cries of pain, even our whimpers of fear and despair.

Last night a church friend called me. She was weeping on the phone. She could barely get the words out, but eventually I pieced the story together. She and her family were in desperate trouble. They didn't know where to turn. I didn't either. Their story was a sad one.

One thing I did know was that they needed to be among people who loved them, and I told her so. "Come to church tomorrow," I said. "We've been

missing you the past couple of weeks." I invited them to come to our house after worship to have dinner, talk, read the paper, maybe play pool in the basement.

It was a hard sell. "We don't even look like a family," she said. God doesn't care about that, I assured her. Many of us are pretty much of a mess a lot of the time. I told her about a serious addiction with which I was wrestling and a rift it had caused in our family. Without giving details, I assured her that many other families at church who looked rock solid on the outside were struggling with equally painful issues. I finally convinced her that God welcomes us even when we're in disarray. After all, consider the people Jesus chose as his dinner companions. He didn't seek the company of those who thought they had it all together.

My friend and her family came. During the stewardship moment in the service, the speaker described outreach as being "one beggar telling another where to find food."

Later at the house, their stiff postures and stony faces thawed as we talked, laughed, ate, and talked some more. We haven't heard laughter in our house for a long time, they said as they left. Don't be strangers, I told them. We need each other. I need you to ask me each Sunday, "How're you doing?" And you need me to ask you, "How's it going?" And to really wait for the answer. 🌿

Mary Mortimore Dossin and her husband, Ernie, divide their time between Chazy, N.Y., and St. Petersburg, Fla.

A photograph of a grocery store produce aisle. In the foreground, a shopping cart with a blue handle and a metal frame is visible. The cart is filled with various fruits, including watermelons and yellow squash. In the background, several people are walking through the aisle, and more produce is visible on the shelves. The title "SUNDAY SHOPPER" is overlaid on the image in a large, stylized, red font with a black outline.

SUNDAY SHOPPER

by Kathleen Kastilahn

I blink. There he stands in the produce aisle bearded and dusty, wearing sandals and a homespun tunic, a tunic! He's quickly tossing carrots in his basket. Something else, too? Blink. He's gone.

But, still, I hear the ancient accusation: "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" From the Pharisees, of course, demanding Jesus explain why his disciples began to pluck heads of grain as they walked with him through fields on the sabbath. It happens early in Jesus' ministry (Mark 2:23-27).

And Jesus wastes no words setting them straight: "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath." He knew the third commandment, "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy." And he reminded them, even, that a hungry King David once "...ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions."

Obviously, I've been muddling too long over the question of whether or not it's a sin to shop on Sundays. Blink! No shopper from the first century. No voices, either. This question was one settled for our grandmothers, if not mothers, decades ago by "blue laws" that prohibited retail activity, among other things. However those blue laws were struck from the books in most towns and today stores are open 24/7, and many of these are groceries.

Most of the Lutheran women who participated in my brief on-line conversation on the subject assumed I meant food shopping when I asked about their Sunday shopping habits. And for most of those, making a trip to the grocery—or not—didn't matter much.

But observing the sabbath, that is, making and spending a different kind of set-aside time? The pressures and priorities of the women's varied life situations show up in their struggles—and solutions.

SHOP OR NOT TO SHOP?

"I don't differentiate [Sunday] from any other day," said Barbara Spoonheim, a member of Resurrection Lutheran church, Chicago. "I shop when I must (the fridge is empty!) but I rarely get pleasure from shopping." She's

a single woman in her mid-30s who heads the development efforts for a non-profit agency in Chicago.

Another Resurrection member, Rachele Ankney, said she "very, very rarely" shops on Sundays. She's a math professor and has no children. She added she will shop "when I need to pick up an extra ingredient for my after-church brunch with my husband, something I anticipate all week." That brunch, itself, is an ingredient of her sabbath experience.

And Lois Barliant, also at Resurrection, who's at a different place in her life—a wife, mother of two grown children, and writer—tells of a similar pattern as her church friends. She's not bothered if she has to pick up something on her way home from church but avoids it by "keeping the house fairly well-supplied." That frees up the after-church hours. "I make a point of writing a letter to my siblings," she said. It's a time set aside to stay connected with family, a sabbath activity.

Heidi Ernst is a freelance editor and writer "nights and weekends" in Charlottesville, Va. She is a wife and the mother of a 5-year-old daughter. "I don't have a rule against shopping on Sundays. If I do [grocery] shop, it's usually somewhat of a pleasure," said the member of St. Mark Lutheran, "only because it means I'm not sitting in my chair at my computer!" It also means it's her week to cook.

At this time in her life, the idea of sabbath is, well, just that. "I'm out of every possible good habit I could have," she lamented. "No exercise, no time for myself, always forgetting to take my vitamins (and sick today because of it)."

OBSERVING SABBATH TIME

Some women do organize their schedules to avoid pushing their carts in the supermarket on Sundays. Heather Wallace holds a job as an executive assistant at a foundation and is studying for a master's degree at Loyola University, Chicago. She lives more than two hours from the city in rural Compton, Ill., where

her husband, Jamie, is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church. "We're both ready for a break by Sunday afternoon," she said, adding that she usually shops on Thursday or Friday after work. "We can use the time we save to drive to a nearby state park to hike."

That's the sabbath part of their Sunday. The evenings often are filled with confirmation and youth events. So they try to take one night each week to go out to dinner—"a time to rest and a time to take a break together." More sabbath.

Monica Perin teaches law every Saturday at a community college in Houston and on Sunday worships at New Hope Lutheran Church, Missouri City, Texas, with her husband of 36 years. Neither of their grown children lives at home. For her, shopping falls in the category of chore. "I spend Sunday reading the paper or a book, relaxing," she said. "I definitely don't like to do house or yard work, and it bugs me that my husband often does do yard work." She's clear that work can stop, should stop, in appreciation of sabbath.

Perin calls her stance a "residual custom from the way I grew up." That was near Akron, Ohio, in the 50s and 60s when the stores, groceries included, were closed on Sunday. "I don't remember my parents ever saying we don't do this or that on Sunday," she said. "But we were at church all morning, and so my parents—especially my mom—were ready to rest in the afternoon (after she prepared, served and cleaned up dinner, of course!)."

Bea Favre grew up in that era, in Atlanta in a Southern Baptist family. Her dad had a job with a rotating seven-day schedule. She recalls that he hated it when he had to work on a Sunday, but felt "he was forgiven since this was how he provided for his family." But Sundays, she pointed out, "were always go, go, go. Never a day of rest." She recalls morning and evening church services, helping with a full-blown Sunday dinner and afternoons during her teen years playing piano at prisons and nursing homes.

Things have changed a lot for Favre, who drove to Sacramento's downtown St. John Lutheran Church with her husband from their home in suburban Carmichael. Sundays aren't so full for the retired psychologist and mother of two grown children, though she and her husband co-chaired the recent renovation of the church and now are heading a capital campaign. She shops when she needs to "with no regard as to what the day of the week is," she said; her shopping simply "running errands." With a grocery store less than a mile from her house, she stops in many days a week, sometimes more than once a day.

On Sunday, Bea Favre tries to keep the schedule clear. And she does garden. It's not a chore—but sabbath time. "Gardening always makes me feel close to God," she said. "It reminds me of the many parables of Jesus, especially the one about the wheat and tares growing together."

A DAY APART

If shopping for food doesn't seem to be a make-or-buy break issue of observing Sunday as a day apart, other shopping ventures may actually promote the idea.

"I've been shopping on Sundays with my sisters and nieces who enjoy the 'sport' more than I. They seem to see it as restful," said Lois Barliant of Chicago.

Monica Kauppinen also likes the leisure of shopping on a Sunday. "When I can just browse or shop for a craft project, then it's a treat for me," said the woman who is an administrator at California State University, Sacramento. She is married and mother of a 12-year-old daughter in confirmation class at St. John Lutheran Church. Kauppinen also goes to office supply stores and big box stores on Sundays "when I have time because I like to see what is offered, what's new and inventive, and then I can decide to buy it then or in the future."

She said shopping depends on whether she attends morning church and helps at Sunday school. When she

oes, she said, “then our family tradition—mine growing up (she’s the daughter of Bea Favre) and mine with our daughter—is to go out for brunch. It’s not time to back in the shopping, which [then would be] an intrusion into what should be a family-focused, relaxed day.” sabbath day.

Now that her daughter is in confirmation, with masses on Sunday evening after a 5 p.m. contemporary service, the question has changed: “Do I go out [shopping] and can I make it early enough so I don’t have to rush to church?”

Kauppinen describes herself as “one of those working moms who isn’t very good at intentional rest, holy or otherwise. “Sunday is the one day I can sleep in,” she said. “I don’t know if that’s remembering the sabbath but it is giving me rest.” Her other times of quiet and reflection—“when I make time to pray”—are after her husband and daughter leave in the morning and she sits down to breakfast and at night when she finally goes down to sleep. “That’s my God time,” she said.

“My time to breathe.”

So, sabbath. “Made for humankind,” says Jesus. (And though that term in the New Revised Standard Version seems a bit cumbersome, we wouldn’t want to go back to the “made for man” of the Revised Standard Version!) Those words of Jesus are a blessing. They remind us that God who created everything, created sabbath—for us.

It’s not about what we do—plucking heads of grain, then, or shopping, now. It’s about what we receive. No one describes that better than Wayne Muller in his book, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*: “[Sabbath time] is the presence of something that arises when we consecrate a period of time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing, or true.” 🌸

Kathleen Kastilahn considers time spent pushing a grocery cart on Sunday squandered. She writes from her home in Evanston, Ill. where she is a member of St. Paul Lutheran Church and has been known to serve sliced apples, cheddar cheese, and popcorn for supper on the sabbath.

RESOURCE FOR DISCUSSION

Michelle A. Gonzalez is a Roman Catholic theologian who takes a hard look at the American way of shopping—consumerism, a.k.a. “I shop, therefore I am”—in a slim volume called *Shopping* in the Fortress Press (www.fortresspress.com) series “Christian Explorations of Daily Living.” Her starting point is one we readily recognize: “In our particular society, we are constantly encouraged to buy.” And not just by promoters of a particular product but by politicians who point out the patriotic need to get the economy going.

At what cost, Gonzalez asks. She offers three ways to consider the question. The first puts American consumerism in the context of the global economy and shows the impact of how we spend our money on the world’s poor who produce much of what we buy but don’t receive just pay.

Next she ponders specifically theological issues. She reviews many Bible passages, beginning with Matthew 6:25, when Jesus asks, “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” And she urges the reader to ponder why she shops—out of real need, for fun, to boost self-worth.

Finally, Gonzalez proposes what she calls “a constructive reconfiguration of the practice of shopping” that grows from the awareness of how we shop affects both ourselves and our global neighbors and helps us understand that “... how much we shop, the way we shop, and what we shop for has a direct impact on our faith lives.”





FAMILY MATTERS

The Sandwich Challenge

by Sue Gamelin

“AAAAAAAAAAAA!”

screamed the subject line of the email that smoked its way into my inbox. It seemed as if this message from our daughter should have been dropped onto my lap by Harry Potter’s owl in a red envelope that was writhing with frustration and muttering with discontent. But there it was, in black and white: “AAAAAAAA!” When I opened it, I understood. The child care arrangements for her 2-year-old son, Theo, had been put on hold for three weeks, while his caregiver hurried to the bedside of her seriously ill mother. A caregiver needed in two places at one time, but only able to choose one.

Of course, it all worked out. The family members and friends who received the “howler” email wrote back with love and support—and concrete offers of help. “Theo can stay at our home on Mondays and Tuesdays,” said one. “I’ll come over on Wednesdays with the baby,” volunteered another. Now retired, I offered to drive over and stay with them so that I could be Theo’s buddy on Thursdays and Fridays. Our daughter wrote back to all of us, “I’m sorry that I screamed at you. I was frantic! I thought I had everything worked out for Theo, and then it all fell apart. Thanks for being there.”

I’ve heard other sighs “too deep for words” (Romans 8:26) as miserable as that email. When my friend Elizabeth’s mother couldn’t get out of bed any more as her cancer marched its way from organ to organ, Elizabeth sighed a sigh that went all the way down to her socks.

“I don’t know what to do. I want to take care of mom, but now it’s beyond me.” Elizabeth was bone-tired. There had been innumerable achingly slow trips getting her mom from bed to the commode. She’d carried in thoughtfully prepared meals of gentle soups and soups, breads, and then carried them back out again, untouched.

Her sleep was light as she listened for her mother with the ear that had once been on alert for a baby’s cry. Elizabeth sighed out a plea for help. Things worked out. Family and friends and hospice stepped forward, and all of them worked together to find and finance a professional caregiver. A better-rested Elizabeth could pull up a chair by her mom’s bed and wait for those times when she needed an ice chip or wanted to talk.

The Bible doesn’t say that John screamed or even sighed when a dying Jesus managed to whisper through cracked and bleeding lips, “Here is your mother” (John 19:27). I can imagine John drawing his arm around Mary even more tightly. I can also imagine him waking up on Holy Saturday, wondering how it could work out, but knowing he had to. On the other hand, Mary may have been lying awake whispering to herself, “John’s ‘mother’? Can I do it?”

The Zarephathian widow in 1 Kings 17:8–16 says to Elijah, “Feed *you*, with the only food left for my son and me before we starve to death? You’ve got to be kidding.” But feed him, she did, and it all worked out. Abundantly so. Ruth

and Naomi? Paul and Onesimus (Philemon 1)? If we listen carefully, we might hear sighs too deep for words groaning their way to us down through the ages. Or we may hear a scream or two.

The other day I listened to yet another discussion about the sandwich generation. This generation is the one sandwiched between people helping their kids get out on their own in an employment-challenged world and helping their parents cope with lives that are shrinking because of the challenges that aging brings. Baby Boomers are becoming known as this sandwich generation, and I detect sighs built into the conversations that I hear among them. Those sighs are well earned.

Aging parents bring a whole closet-full of issues with them. Maybe even a garage-full. Treating heart disease and cancer and diabetes, losing hearing and eyesight, planning for long-term health care, juggling fixed incomes and/or inadequate income, figuring out when car keys need to be permanently retired, living with grief and loneliness—and working out how to talk about all of these things.

Our kids and grandkids have their own concerns. Diapers, day-care and after-school care, transportation to soccer and dance and karate, visits with the other parent when there's been divorce, bills, grades, drugs, sex, and ... on and

on. Sigh. It's an easy sigh to understand for the in-between generation that is called to help.

At the same time, I wonder if we folks in this sandwiched generation aren't feeling just a bit put upon, just a bit sorry for ourselves. After all, extended families have always had the sandwich challenge, even though it may have been condensed because lifespans were shorter. Could it be that we've become so centered on the nuclear family, so focused on our own independence, that we have forgotten about the responsibilities and the opportunities that our extended families bring?

My grandparents moved into our home when I was born. Their meager pension wouldn't support them, and grandpa's health was frail. Grandpa and Grandma took care of me while my dad was in the Navy in World War II and my mom worked. They were still with us when my sister and I went to college, got married, and moved away, and there still when my mom retired.

For 35 years my parents had this older generation with them. For 35 years this aging couple had to cope with us, the younger generations. I remember my mom saying once, "Here I am 55 years old, and my mother is still waiting up for me when I go out!" Was it easy, all of us living together, year after year? Oh my, no. Those pesky family of

origin issues (FOOIs or "phooeys" as our family has been known to call them) were always present. Some days there was more sighing than others. But being part of our family meant caring for Grandpa and Grandma.

Being part of Jesus' family means caring for others, and then caring again. And again. How we do that caring will vary as much as the number of families that there are. Not only that, our definitions of family will stretch as far and wide as the waters of our baptism. But being called to care for others is a non-negotiable part of our life in Christ.

All of our senses are crucially aware of this as we follow Jesus to Jerusalem these Lenten days. Tagging along behind him are men, women, and children whose lives have been changed by his love. Ahead of him, are those who will shudder in Good Friday's darkness as the earth sighs and groans out its despair. All of us will see what it means to love God with everything we are and have, and to love our neighbors as completely and sacrificially as we love ourselves. The sunrise three days later will make that perfectly clear and perfectly possible. 🌿

The Rev. Sue Gamelin is a retired ELCA pastor living in North Carolina. She and her husband, Tim, have four grown children and nine grandchildren.



NOTHING CAN
SEPARATE
US

by Daryce Hoff Nolan

When I was a little girl, I had pretty, wavy, waist-length brown hair. My mom and I would fight about it every day. It tangled terribly.

She would try to brush it out and I would scream. After a while, she would give up. And off I would go to the school bus stop with my long brown braid swinging behind me.

I also remember my mother's frustration when I returned home from school, a fuzzy-headed mess. She never told me this, but I am sure that her patience eventually ran out. I vividly recall the day she took me to the salon to get a trim. I sat down in the chair and without warning, the hairdresser grabbed my pony tail and with one swipe of the scissors off it went. The stylist held it up like a prize!

I looked at myself in the mirror and saw that my mouth was wide open in a silent scream. I cried and cried over that hair. But mostly I cried over the cruel abruptness of the cut. I do not like surprises.

The surprises keep coming

Last summer, I was on vacation with a friend in Utah, researching genealogy at the Mormon Family History Library. While there I received a call on my cell phone from the school where I teach music. After 21 years of building a vocal music program, my job had been cut. I learned about it while sitting on the library steps. I taught music for more than 30 years. The last 21 years in the same school. I had known many of the students since kindergarten because I taught grades K-12. Last fall was the first time in 30 years I didn't return to the classroom. I was devastated.

I was once again the little girl losing her pony tail without warning, and I cried. This was a shock financially and emotionally. It is likely that my career as a music teacher is over. Hitting bottom is a horrible experience; the thud can be loud and the landing painful. I

never saw this coming, yet I knew I had to move forward in faith.

At my church, I serve as a pastoral associate. I am also a health care chaplain for a hospital near my home. Every Sun-

day for more than three years, my church has prayed for my ministry as a chaplain. Did those prayers work too well? Am I out of a good-paying teaching job so that I could be free to move into full-time ministry?

Perhaps we really should watch out what we pray for. If this change in my life was an answer to prayer, I am not sure I like it. I felt like a bomb detonated in my life, and I was afraid.

So many questions come in situations like this. But I knew there were some ways that could help me in this difficult part of my spiritual journey.

"Why did God do this to me?" is a question almost all of us ask. It's human nature to ask "why" when traumatic life events happen to us. We also can feel so alone and wonder why God has abandoned us. Even Jesus cried out to God in his agony on the cross.

I do not think that God threw me out of teaching so that I could be a full-time chaplain. This layoff did not happen because of God. God is love and life. Losing my job did not feel loving or life giving. The action of God in our life is never like the chopped pony tail.

Now what?

So what is the next step? What should a Christian do when these kinds of bombs go off in our lives? In times of crisis, we should cling to Jesus, not throw up barriers to him. But how do you open up and reach out when all you want to do is to curl up and isolate yourself from others and from God?

It has occurred to me lately that perhaps I need to stop asking where *God* is, and instead ask, where *I* am in relationship to God. A friend reminded me recently that God's comfort and the comfort of friends may be near, and I may not recognize it or be open to it. Am I

possibly pushing God (and others) away when I am in the most need?

Here is what I know about Jesus. He is one of us. He experienced suffering, pain, and trauma, just as we do. Jesus died a human death. This does not take our pain away, but we know that we are not alone. He is there with us to be with us during the worst.

But, we don't know he is there unless we look for him in the sacraments, look for him in the Scripture, but most of all we must look for him and listen for him in the voices of friends and family. They are the hands and voice of God. God is in the comforting well wishes of my students and colleagues. God's love is in the flowers sent to me by my neighbor. God's love is in the embrace of my husband and son.

When the voice in my head starts to tell me I must have done something to bring this on myself or when it screams out that this is unfair, I must replace those thoughts with the hope we get through Christ's resurrection, hope of new beginnings.

I must hear the voice of Jesus in the e-mails I get from students telling me that they love me and thanking me for being their teacher. Hear the good things said to me and really take them in. I must choose love and light. By choosing love and light, we choose to embrace the resurrection.

In hard times, we must also systematically and intentionally draw close to God in Scripture. I pray the Psalms daily. There is hope there. The psalmist had some pretty low moments and yet faith and trust and praise shine through the ancient words. When I don't have words, I let the Psalms speak for me.

It also doesn't hurt to have the memorized verses of my childhood on the tip of my tongue: "Lo, I am with you always." "Nothing can separate us from the love of God." "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Memorizing Scripture is a wonderful way to make God's word a part of us and it is a true comfort to us when we are in pain.

Life-giving love

The very best example of God's life-giving love is the resurrection. I am convinced that I will somehow experience the touch of God, and God will resurrect and bring life from this gut-wrenching situation and all the situations in our lives that make us feel helpless and fearful and alone.

Our brother Jesus gets in the midst of our lives. In the suffering and pain, God is there. God will be there to comfort us and guide us, even die with us. But God will never leave us. In all of our lives there are times like these. God makes a resurrection for all of us.

When I am feeling particularly weak and vulnerable, I take time to renew my baptismal vows. I renounce the power of evil and turn to Jesus Christ as my Savior. When we feel the most alone, we need to make more of an effort to commit ourselves to God and cling to the rites and words and verses that remind us that we belong to God no matter what.

God hangs out right smack dab in the middle of the pain. We should look for God in the midst of chaos and worry. God hangs out in tension and strife. We have to practice hope to find God. My experiences tell me that God heals us in many ways—and healing may not look anything like we expect it to. But there is healing and forgiveness, love and, yes, even joy and resurrection waiting for us. There are wonderful instances of blessing that will show up in little ways: wonderful coincidences and serendipities. Salvation and resurrection comes to us all. God manages to make all things new and turn around even the worst situation.

God's love offers hope. God never promises that we won't suffer. But God gets the last word, and it is *resurrection*. 🌿

Daryce Hoff Nolan taught vocal music for 32 years. She is a hospital chaplain for Advocate South Suburban Hospital and serves as pastoral associate for St. Helena's Episcopal Church in Burr Ridge, Ill. She is married to Robert Emmett Nolan, and they have one son, Doug.



ET US PRAY

Waking Up to God

by Julie K. Ageson

In this month of Easter celebrations, thinking about the resurrection is part of the landscape. April is a resurrection exhibit itself, as the last remnants of winter give way to new life and the greening of spring. But I'd like to think about resurrection (and perhaps barriers to resurrection) in some other ways. I'd like to think about resurrection as waking up to God.

Resurrection is a message of reassurance and hope that each one of us is a beloved child of God. It's a message to the victims of bullying, to people stigmatized because of sexuality, to those on the edges of society who may feel marginalized and dismissed. Resurrection is the unutterable love of God and God's unconditional, sustaining mercy that embraces all. Do we parcel it out because such lavish love and mercy make us nervous?

Resurrection is waking up to God's presence all around us. It's about seeing God in real life, in a real world. For a group of miners buried thousands of feet below the earth's surface last fall, it was about shared vulnerability and hope, and the skilled technicians whose diligent work finally freed them from their cave of death. For people living on the street or families without enough food, it's about a local shelter or a generous food pantry. For those at the end of life or whose lives seem utterly hopeless, resurrection may be a loving touch and a compassionate voice.

Resurrection is noticing God in the endless unfolding of creation. I see res-

urrection in the new life of spring, in the rushing water that marks the end of winter, in the beauty of blossoming trees, in the greening of the earth.

I see resurrection in the countless ways people care for one another. I see resurrection in those who are committed to making the world a better place. Why do we limit resurrection when there are so many signs of God all around us?

The church is not a shelter from the world. And the world is not meant to be at odds with God. The whole world is God's house, even though we may try to keep God in certain places. The power of God's resurrection is everywhere. In our relationships with each other, in church disputes and seasons of dissent, in the sorrows and joys that are part of life, in the cycles of nature, and in the life and death struggles that come to all of us, God's promise of resurrection is ours.

We are made in God's image. God lives in us. *We* are loved beyond our furthest imaginings. *We* bear God's love and mercy, yes even God's resurrecting power to the world and to all we meet.

O God, help us wake up to you! Help us live fully in the resurrection joy that surrounds us. Help us see you in one another, in the places where we live and work, in the dark and in the light. Help us know that life with you is truly resurrection life. 🌿

Julie K. Ageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.

LIVING AN EASTER LIFE

by Marguerite M. Rourk

In baptism our gracious heavenly Father frees us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ...by water and the Holy Spirit we are reborn children of God...

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Holy Baptism, p. 227)

I am joined to Christ's death and resurrection. The Eastered-into-Christ me will live forever because of water splashed up out of a silver bowl onto my six-month-old head on Easter Sunday morning, April 21, 1947, as Frank and Sara presented their first born for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Greenville, S.C.

I haven't the least idea of how that worked. It's a miracle, and we don't ask how a miracle works: It just does, and baptism is most certainly a miracle. Water

+ God words + the Holy Spirit in there somewhere + baby (we're all babies in faith) = baptism, as we are ushered into the church, the *ekklesia*, the called-out people that is our forever home (militant now, triumphant then). We are forever different because we are forever joined to Christ's death and resurrection.

But how in this world was I, a squirming little baby, suddenly propelled from rebirth to re-living? How did I get from reborn to re-living? I don't know; that's part of the miracle. But I don't have to know. God takes care of all that, and I am

glad for the arrangement. All I have to do is enjoy the miracle for the rest of my baptized life on this good old earth. I can, quite literally, live with that.

The more I have aged as an adult, the more I come to know with certainty that while the reborn part is truly a most marvelous gift, it is the re-rising that is The Big Deal. In Jesus Christ I can die to sin and be reborn each day until he comes again, but without re-rising in him every day, I would still be that little baby with the wet head. Rebirth empowers us to begin each new day

out it is re-rising—resurrection—that empowers us to live each day.

Each of us humans is multi-dimensional: We are physical, mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual beings. Every one of our dimensions is equally important and all are intricately interwoven into our personhood. Likewise, each of our dimensions is equally important to the One Who devised the system way back when. These dimensions are the glorious components of our being created *imago Dei*, created in God's image. Our Amazing Creator has filled us to overflowing with the Creator's amazing-ness, in holy pleasure sharing with us all the characteristics and attributes that render us *imago Dei*.

QUIT THINKING AND START ENJOYING

It is hard to grab, to understand. It is harder to feel, to make inside me, to claim as part of me. It is hardest to live, because I am not certain exactly what resurrec-

All of the foregoing is easy enough to say, or write, but

tion is for me. I have struggled with understanding how resurrection is of my essence, like my blood type, my ethnic heritage, my DNA, all those things, known and unknown, that make me *me*. How is resurrection ontological—part of my very being?

That is a mystery, a glorious unknown that God thought up and understands. That mystery is still not fully revealed to us. Not only is it necessary for us mortals to accept that mystery pervades each dimension of



our being, it is necessary for us to be glad for the mystery. We should be thankful that there are still things for which we have no tidy explanation, and rejoice that such is the reality of our God-given life joined to Christ's death and resurrection.

Some people have said to me, "Pastor, I don't think I can believe in something I don't understand. I need for you to explain all these things you say are miracles or mysteries." I try to assure them as pastorally as possible that they can stop with the first three words of their statement: "I don't think." All too often we are taught that if we just use our brains and "think things through," then we can understand anything.

Somebody has lied to them! My best pastoral advice to those folks is to quit thinking and start enjoying. Quit thinking and start celebrating! Quit thinking and start relishing the mystery—giving thanks that we are not called to understand everything, but rather, we are called to have faith and to trust that God is always good for a promise. Quit thinking about what we cannot understand now, but will understand in the fullness of the resurrection.

Instead we should expend our energy on giving thanks for and taking to heart St. Paul's affirming words to the Christians at Corinth: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

THROUGH THE TOMB

Well then, emboldened by our new tack on miracle and mystery, let us explore how our resur-

rection in Christ unfolds and is revealed and active in the daily encounters that are threaded through our lives. On that first Easter, the women going to tend to Jesus' body found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. All they knew for sure was that the dead Jesus had been placed in that tomb on Friday afternoon and the tomb had been closed.

Then, on Sunday morning, the tomb was open and its occupant was no longer there. Even though seized with fear and amazement (who wouldn't have been?), those women managed to get back to the other disciples and tell them what they had seen. The glorious mystery of our resurrected life in Christ was begun.

Because of Easter, we will never have to go *to* the tomb; we will only go *through* it. When we die, our completed resurrection life is only a stone's roll away and out we come—brand new.

In infinite goodness and mercy, our Lord blesses us with his call to resurrection life *now*. True, it is a temporal calling, one for this life, but when we live our baptismal miracle, joined to Christ's death and resurrection, we accept his grace-gift. A gift is meant to be used and enjoyed, so let's get on with it!

Are you part of a resurrection faith community? With each passing year, I am more and more thankful that the first Affirmation of Baptism promise is "to live among God's faithful people." On the face of it, Christ Church, Fairfax (where I serve) isn't any different than most other Holy Spirit-gathered saints-and-sinners communities. But, thanks to our name, we are very conscious that we enjoy the high privilege of being able to stand on the front porch, open wide our arms, and declare, "Welcome to Christ!"

I am richly blessed to shepherd a congregation that knows the dangers of rolling that stone back to the front of the tomb. Fear-mongering, dissension, uncharitable behavior towards neighbor, snarking about anyone or anything, discrimination on any basis, spreading gossip and rumors, and constant complaining with nary a word of thanks or positive encouragement are among the myriad ways Christians can be fractious and fractured. All of these dreadful behaviors and more are efficient ways to slam that tomb closed again.

If any of these horrid scenarios is prevalent in your congregation, how can your resurrection living help to bring about the peace of Christ? Even in a congrega-

tion as wonderful as Christ, we must be ever vigilant, for sepulchral darkness always lurks nearby, ever ready to snuff out resurrection light. (Do you remember St. Luke's description of our Lord's temptation when he recounted that "The devil departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time"? Yeah, well, the great deceiver still recognizes an opportune time when it appears.)

OVERCOMING THE STONES

When we live the resurrection life together, we can help members overcome the stones that sometimes seem to pile up in front of the tomb. It is part of our baptismal calling that we do this in community, but we are also each called as child of God, "sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever," to live fully into the resurrection (*ELW*, Holy Baptism, p. 231).

No, it's not easy, and no, I can't tell you how to do this. Each of us must listen to the Savior's voice, for he always assures us of who he is and what he can help us do. Do you need to seek a faith sister or a brother in the gospel with whom you can communicate in trust and unload your tomb-blocking boulder? Just talking to someone in faith and trust can help free us from whatever barriers block our way to resurrection life. Ask Jesus to guide you to that particular stone-kicking person; he will do exactly that, and you can begin anew to live your resurrection life now.

Could you listen in faith and trust to help another live a "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven" resurrection life? ("Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven," *ELW* #864) Might you be a friend or surrogate parent or mentor who could listen to, pray with, and encourage someone struggling with rolling that boulder away? What are the stones that block their way or yours? Do you think you can't roll that stone away with your ears and your heart? Oh, but you can!

St. Francis of Assisi is credited with having said, "Preach the gospel always, and when necessary, use

words." Living into the resurrection for and with our sisters and brothers is preaching the gospel.

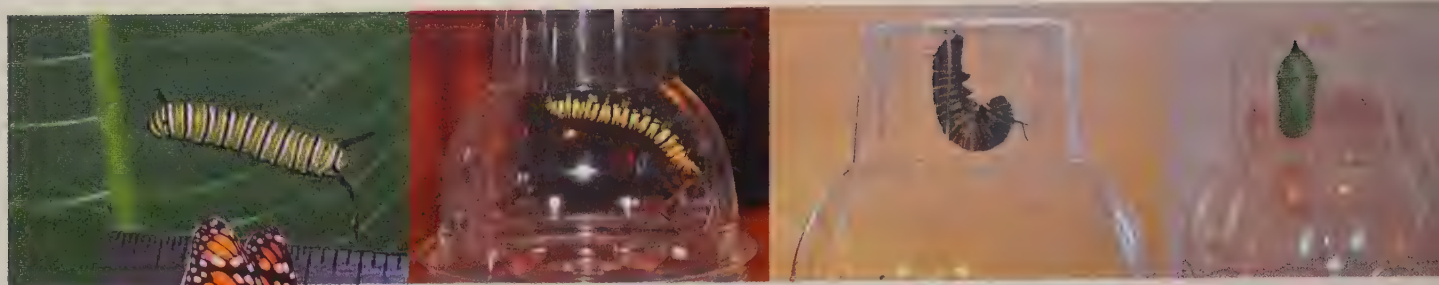
In a 1963 sermon, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared that "We are caught in an inescapable web of mutuality...." That is the resurrection life; that is the life joined to Christ's death and re-rising. It is in the resurrection life that we most intimately meet and interact with our faith sisters and brothers. Not only are we those multi-dimensional human individuals, we are physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational communities, for we "are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). We, each of us and all of us, are both miracle and mystery.

There is infinite mystery in the miracle of our baptismal joining to Christ's death and resurrection. There is mysterious miracle in our baptismal re-rising, the powers of which are awesome in their breadth and depth. Those powers poured into us are incomprehensible even in our current resurrection life; they utterly defy imagination of what they shall be in our completed re-rising.

The voice from the burning bush commanded Moses to take off his sandals for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. Our resurrection life is holy ground, because we are forever joined to Christ. Ever since that first day of the week when death had died and the Son came up, we have been Eastered into life, resurrection and all.

Easter and resurrection (and the rest of our faith) are indeed miracle and mystery, but there you have it. As that angel said so many times "Fear not," for part and parcel of the good news is that it's all miracle to us and none of it is a mystery to God. All is as it should be, and we are risen indeed. Hallelujah! 🌸

The Rev. Dr. Marguerite M. Rourk, pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fairfax, Va., shares her life with husband, David, and sons, Edwin of Portland, Ore., and Matthew of Asheville, N.C., with the Incomparable Grandson Tiernan, and with two cats and three ferrets. The ferrets remain in charge.



resurrection reminder

by Sue Edison-Swift

BUTTERFLIES ARE SYMBOLS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION. I KNOW WHY.

After a worship service two summers ago, I claimed my first Monarch Ministry kit: a days-old Monarch caterpillar in a Dairy Queen cup habitat, a snack bag of cut-up milkweed leaves (a Monarch caterpillar's only food), and a sheet of instructions. I peered into the DQ cup to meet my caterpillar. "Humph," said a boy with a caterpillar twice as big as mine, "Your caterpillar is *tiny*."

"Yes," I said, just a bit offended for my little one; "It's tiny *and* mighty." With that, my caterpillar had a name, "Tiny Mighty," T.M. for short.

T.M. spent his first day with me happily nibbling a hole in a piece of milkweed leaf.

The next day T.M. didn't eat. That evening I left a new, fresh leaf. In the morning it was left

untouched. Not one nibble. I went back to my sheet of instructions, and read "Occasionally, the caterpillar roams away from the leaf for a day or so. It needs to rest and shed its skin."

Still, I fretted. Life is so fragile.

And then T.M. started to eat, and eat, and eat. Each day it would devour two, then three, then four or more leaf pieces, leaving only the stems. I noted T.M.'s developmental steps with pride.

On the seventh day, T.M. attached itself to the top of the container and hung in a "J" position for 15 hours, laboring to transform into a chrysalis.

The actual transformation is dramatically hard work. T.M.'s skin split, revealing the green of the soon-to-be chrysalis. T.M. writhed to throw off its skin.

Death and Grief

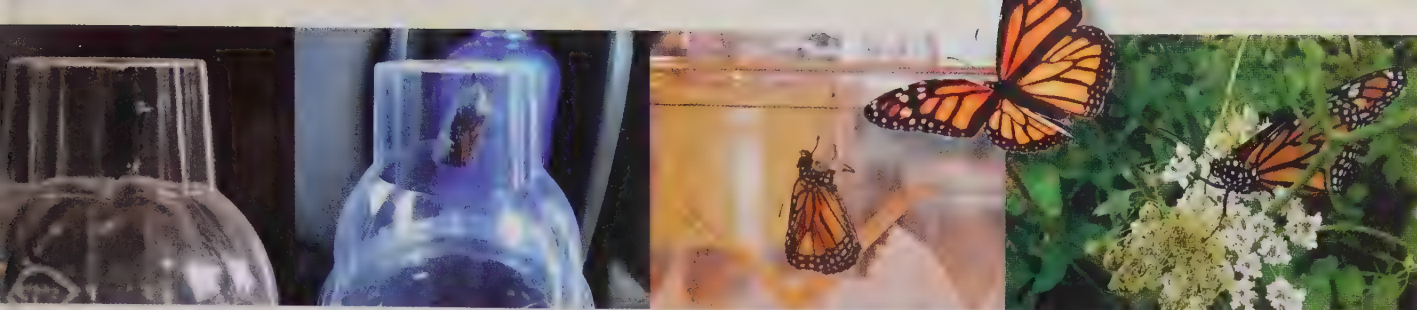
After burying his beloved wife of 53 years, a dear man told me "Dying is not for wimps." It is hard work. Jesus has been there, suffering, dying. Jesus is here, Jesus is with us as we journey into the valley of the shadow of death.

In less than 15 minutes, my caterpillar's work was finished. There was no sign of the caterpillar that had been. A beautiful chrysalis adorned with a crown of gold dots hung deathly still.

I knew the rest of the story. I knew that in eight to 12 days, T.M. would have a new and better life as a butterfly. Still, I missed the caterpillar that had been a part of my life for eight days. I missed *a bug* even knowing with absolute certainty that its next journey would be taken on wing, and its next food would be as sweet as nectar.

The grief, the sorrow, the unimaginable loss that some must live with calls for nothing short of the Holy Spirit praying with sighs too deep for words. Jesus has been there, weeping with grief. Jesus is here, Jesus is with us, in our grief.

On the 10th day, early in the morning, the chrysalis was dark



and transparent. Today would be Transcendental Monarch's (T.M. for short) birthday. As it happened, four of us needed to be on the road that morning, so the chrysalis came along; its container fit perfectly in a cupholder.

Miraculous and New

It takes just a minute or two for a butterfly to break out of the chrysalis. A vulnerable newborn, it then hangs on to the remnant of the chrysalis for two to four hours, pumping fluid to expand its wings and slowly spreading its new wings to dry.

T.M.'s outstretched wings revealed two dots: it's a boy!

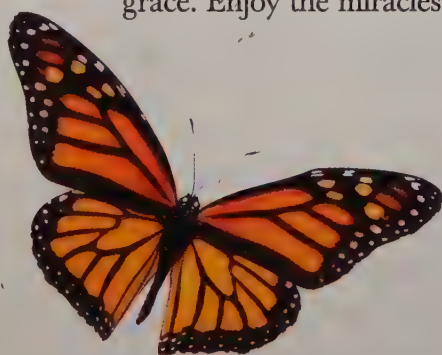
Jesus was there, too, a vulnerable newborn. Jesus is here, Jesus is with us through all the miraculous and mundane days of our lives.

Three hours later, T.M. seemed ready. We pulled off to the side of a rural road and placed him on a wildflower bloom. That's the thing about butterflies, they are ours only to set free.

Last summer, my second-floor balcony sported a potted milkweed plant in addition to herb planters.

Wonder of wonders, I found three *tiny*, one-day-old monarch larvae on my milkweed plant, which I named Trinity Monarch (T.M. for short) A, B, and C. The next day, Trinity D was discovered. Two days later, I spotted Trinity E ... the biggest caterpillar I have ever seen this side of a chrysalis.

After "Trinity E" was discovered, a Facebook friend wrote, "I love how the 'Trinity' keeps growing, rather like our vision of the expansiveness of God's love and grace. Enjoy the miracles!"



Resurrection and Life

The last discovered, Trinity E, was the first to fly away. T.E. emerged at the Lutheran Center and as I rode down the elevator to let him go, he climbed into my hair and sat there like a decorative barrette. He soared off the moment I walked outside. T.E. made three joyful

loops around the courtyard before disappearing into the clouds.

The first discovered, Trinity A, was the last to fly away. He emerged as my daughter, Annie, who was serving as a resident hospital chaplain, attended the funeral service for a 5-year-old boy. Renamed in the boy's memory, this last butterfly took his time taking wing, cautiously taking short flights about the balcony before flying off into the trees.

Annie used pictures of this butterfly to make cards for the boy's mother, grandmother, and brother. The boy's mother wrote back to say how much the cards meant to the family, especially to the grieving brother, who loves butterflies.

Butterflies are symbols of resurrection; Jesus the Christ is our resurrection and life. When you look up and see a butterfly on the wing, remember the women who looked up to see "the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back" (Mark 16:4). Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! 🌿

Sue Edison-Swift and her husband, Paul Edison-Swift, are members of St. Luke's Lutheran in Park Ridge, Ill.

OUTSIDE THE TOMB

by Brooke Petersen

If asked to name the biggest events in my life, I would probably be able to list all those events on one hand.

The days I finished college and graduate school. The day I knelt at an altar and was ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament. The first time I stepped into a pulpit. The morning I put on my wedding dress and married my husband. Some of these events were the culmination of years of work, others months of planning. We all have them—those moments when it feels as if everything has changed, and we close one chapter of our lives and begin another.

The most confusing part about all of these things, though, is what happened the next morning. On the day of my seminary graduation, I threw my graduation garb in the trunk of my red Taurus, dashed to a preaching interview with the congregation I now serve, and managed to slip into a cap and gown while parked on the side of the road just moments before the graduation ceremony. Everything about that day was exciting and sparkling and dramatic. My parents cried, I cried, colleagues and I accepted degrees we had worked for years to earn. Everything felt as if it would surely be huge and different forever.

But the day after I graduated, I found myself ordering the same latte from the same barista who made my drinks several times a week during the previous four years. It tasted the same. She said good morning in exactly the same tone of voice. The day after I was ordained, I walked down

the street in my neighborhood, and not one person seemed aware that something major and life changing had happened to me. We waved hello in exactly the same way.

After every one of these big life events, the next morning I woke up in the same room as the day before, with the same wall color with the same pillows, and the same dust bunnies in the corner. I put on the same clothes. Another day passed, and for anyone looking at me from the outside, everything looked pretty similar to the day



efore. And yet, it wasn't. Something had changed in the deepest part of my heart.

As we celebrate this season of Easter, we recognize that as Christians people in the world, absolutely everything was transformed by that amazing truth of Jesus' rise from the tomb. Death no longer has the last word. Fear no longer keeps us bound. Freedom, love, mercy, and grace win the day. We are an Easter people, who live in the power of the resurrection. But there are plenty of days after Easter morning when we

will wake up in the same beds, with the same morning ritual of brushing our teeth and taking a shower. Eventually, the ham from Easter brunch makes sandwiches. The to-do lists continue to grow. Bills show up in the mailbox. Hearts still get broken. Our spirits are still burdened by the cares and tragedies of the world. Sometimes it is nearly impossible to feel the power of the resurrection in our bones because our bones just feel tired. We feel lost. And a little stuck. Sometimes the brightness of that resurrection morning seems

pretty far away from the ordinary every day.

GETTING UNSTUCK

We are not alone. In fact, the Bible is full of stories of the followers of Jesus feeling pretty much stuck in the same ordinary place. In the 20th chapter of the Gospel of John, we find the disciples huddled in a locked upper room, afraid and unsure of what it means to have a savior that didn't stay dead. Even after Jesus appears to them, not once, but twice in John's Gospel,

we find them back in their old jobs, fishing on the Sea of Tiberius (now Galilee) far from where they rejoiced at Jesus' appearance in their midst. Like us, they didn't seem to always know what to do with a life on this side of the resurrection.

The stone has been rolled away and God's people are invited to live in the freedom of a world that is no longer bordered by death and surrounded by fear. And yet there are things that continue to keep us bound and far from the places of freedom and love to which God calls us. God's people get stuck in the dark tomb, far from the sunlight of that Easter morning. We find ourselves like the disciples, huddled and hidden, or just back to the same old lives we live every day. So what are God's people to do?

We can begin by taking note of our surroundings. What is keeping us bound? Fear, disappointments, suffering? What is sapping the joy from our lives? What stone is in our way?

Experiencing the resurrection involves taking the risk to dream again, to believe that because Jesus lives, a new day really has dawned, a new way of being in the world is possible. People of faith can dare to dream about justice, love, joy, and abundant life. Patterns no longer need to keep us stuck in old ways of being. The siren song of apathy is not nearly as loud and as strong as

the "Alleluia!" of the resurrection.

The disciples, even after seeing the risen Lord twice, ended up in their old boats doing their old job, fishing. It is a wonder that Jesus keeps coming back in the Gospel of John, even after these disciples have put their hands in his wounds and believed. Jesus shows up again because what the disciples have forgotten, neglected, or ignored is not that he lives, but that they can dream again *because he lives*.

The disciples can be more than they were before Jesus called them from those old jobs into a new way of living in the world.

HOLDING ONE ANOTHER

Having noted our surroundings, we might take a moment to notice who is actually stuck here in the tomb with us. One of the powerful aspects of living as a community of believers is that we never wander this world alone. Every Sunday, all over the world, God's people gather because we are made to be in relationship with one another. A pastor in my life was fond of reminding me that one of the greatest temptations of this life is to believe that no one could ever understand my personal pain. This is just plain false.

Sometimes all we need in order to move out of the tomb is to believe that our suffering is not too deep or foreign to our community of faith. The people of God will love us

enough to help us get from inside the tomb to the world outside. Together in our communities of faith we hold one another accountable and reassure and comfort one another in our pain and suffering. We gather at God's table, we feast on the body and blood of Jesus Christ, we baptize and we bury, we preach and we pray. In doing these concrete, practical things, we are living out the resurrection in the world together.

We tell stories of grace and mercy and love, we satisfy our hungers at the table of God, we confess and baptize, we repent and forgive ourselves and each other—because that's what God's people have been doing through centuries. The tomb can get crowded with all these sinners, but if we are willing to open ourselves to trust the people of God, it is a whole lot easier to move out into the light!

Sometimes, when Monday morning rolls around, the community that gathers on Sunday can seem pretty far away and the tomb can seem pretty dark, but because of what God has done, our "alone" will never be quite as alone as it once was.

PUSHING THE STONE

We eventually must surrender to the fact that we can't really get out of the tomb on our own. Fortunately, God has a way to accomplish

God's will in the world despite a flawed people. In a culture like ours that so highly values self-sufficiency, it takes a lifetime of work to let go of the idea that *we* have the ability to secure our salvation. When it comes to experiencing the power of God to make all things new, it doesn't depend on us at all. We don't try to raise Jesus from the dead by our own power because God has already done it.

We don't push away the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb

Because of the resurrection, we are a people of dreams, people who worship a living savior . . .

Because it is just too big for us to push on our own. God rolls away the stone out of infinite love and mercy for each one of us exactly as we are, not because we deserve it or because we've proven our worth.

Jesus shows up in the 20th chapter of John to a gathering of disciples literally locked away because of fear. These are the people who promised that no matter what happened to their teacher and friend, they were going to be with him to the end, even if it meant death. However, when life started to get scary, these followers of Jesus were

nowhere to be found. Even after they heard that Jesus wasn't staying stuck in that musty old tomb, they still marched to the upper room and shut and locked the door because their fear was a lot heavier and bigger than their faith.

But Jesus ignores locked doors and shows up in their midst. They certainly have not shown their worth, they deserted their teacher and friend in his hour of deepest need, but none of that seems to matter to the risen Christ. Jesus

shows up in their midst out of grace and love and gives them hope for a different future. No longer only known by their failures, they are now known as the people who have seen the risen Lord and those sent out to tell the entire world what happened that Easter morning. They are given hope and a purpose for their lives—to witness to the abundant love and grace of God.

OUTSIDE THE TOMB

God's love calls us out of the stuck places not because we have proven we deserve the call, but because the

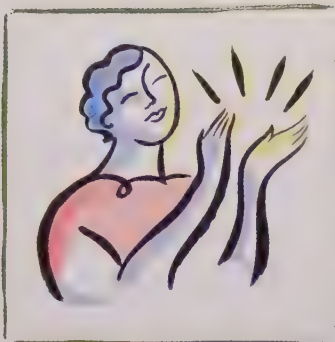
very call itself changes us, just as it did those fearful disciples. Instead of cowering in fear, they became preachers and proclaimers. God uses all of us even when we can't hide our flaws, our messes, and our brokenness. God's been using broken people for a long time, and it is in the working of God that our brokenness gets patched up.

Because of the resurrection, we are a people of dreams, people who worship a living savior who calls us to places we cannot even imagine by paths that are yet unseen. Jesus is leading and guiding us and giving us the power to believe something different about ourselves and our communities.

Even if the barista at Starbucks serves us the same old latte, or the to-do lists continue to grow at the same rate, somewhere deep in ourselves, on that Easter morning something shifted in the hearts of God's people. Because of the gift of God, we are a new people, a dreaming people, a visionary people—even if no one can see it when we take our morning walk.

Jesus lives on Easter morning and, maybe even most importantly, on the day after. Jesus lives, and invites us to live as well—outside the tomb, on Easter Sunday and on Monday morning, in the sunlight, together. ☘

The Rev. Brooke Petersen serves as pastor at Irving Park Lutheran Church in Chicago.



WE RECOMMEND

Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

Compiled from sources including the ELCA News Service, Seeds for the Parish, and www.elca.org

New Bible for reflection, inspiration

Now you can use the NRSV translation and the wisdom of author C.S. Lewis to read your daily devotions. *The C.S. Lewis Bible*, published by Harper One, helps readers reflect on important biblical passages by pairing the author's writings with Scripture.

The C. S. Lewis Bible uses Lewis' spiritual classics—*Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Miracles*, and *A Grief Observed*—as well as some of his other works to illuminate Scripture.

Key features of the new Bible include 600 selections from C.S. Lewis for contemplation and devotional reading; introductory essays on C.S. Lewis' view of Scripture; and indexes to guide you to each reading from Lewis.

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LivingLutheran.com serves up a daily blend of culture, conversation, and community for ELCA members and friends. The Web site presents thoughts from every day Lutherans through blogs, videos, and to-the-point questions.

You won't find breaking news there, although there's plenty of commentary on what's happening in the world and what ELCA members think about it.

The Web site has resources for congregations, videos to inspire and amuse, and places to share what's on your mind.

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Nearly one in four women around the world is physically or sexually abused in her lifetime. Gender violence causes more death and disability among women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war.

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Women of the ELCA is in cyberspace

Read our blog from our home page (www.womenoftheelca.org) or go directly to <http://blogs.elca.org/women>. We talk about all kinds of subjects, from managing how we react to change to living in an interfaith world to how we feel about our hair turning gray.

Talk to your sisters in faith from all over the country about anything and everything at Women of the ELCA on Facebook: www.facebook.com/WomenoftheELCA.



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Barriers to Resurrection

by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo and Jensen Seyenkulo

WORSHIP RESOURCES

ELW Evangelical Lutheran Worship (*also known as the red book*)

LBW Lutheran Book of Worship (*also known as the green book*)

WOV With One Voice (*also known as the blue book*)

TFF This Far By Faith (*also known as the African American hymnal*)

LLC Libro de Liturgia y Cántico (*also known as the Latino hymnal*)

W&P Worship and Praise (*also known as the contemporary hymnal*)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Amos 3:3 (KJV)

THEME VERSE

"They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back." Mark 16:3–4

MAIN TEXT

Mark 16:1–8

OPENING

See devotional reading below.

Guidelines and Discussion Method for our Time Together

To facilitate the discussion of barriers to experiencing resurrection, we are going to adapt the rules for engagement and the invitation method of discussion, both of which are printed in their entirety in the September 2010 issue and are available online at www.lutheranwomantoday.org.

DEVOTIONAL READING

We are going to prepare for our time together today by engaging in *Lectio Divina*, an ancient spiritual practice where a Bible passage is read and then there is time for meditation on the Word of God. The pur-

pose is to pray the Scripture. We will use the overall theme verse Amos 3:3 and the theme verse for this session of the Bible study Mark 16:3–4.

Begin by breathing deeply and getting focused. Breathe deeply and slowly, focusing on each breath.

READ AMOS 3:3 ALOUD.

THEN READ MARK 16:3–4.

Simply listen to the whole text. The text will be read at a slower pace than usual without emphasis on any particular words.

Reflect during the minute of silence.

Listen to Amos 3:3 and Mark 16:3–4 again. Listen for a word or phrase that grabs your attention. During the next minute of silence, silently pray with that word or phrase.

As we gather together as the body of Christ in this room, let us sing together one of the following songs:

SONG (*Select one*)

"Thy Holy Wings" ELW 613, WOV 741

"Give Me Jesus" ELW 770, TFF 165, WOV 777

PRAYER

Resurrection Savior Jesus, we gather to rejoice in the power of your resurrection in our lives. We know that you call us to live resurrection lives where we live to our fullest potential the life you

ave given us. Where we are blocked from knowing our unconditional love, remove the barriers. Where we hold on to things that are not life giving, help us to let go. Move us forward in faith and love towards you and others in our lives. Amen.

SESSION OVERVIEW

We live as resurrection people, in the knowledge that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead, overcoming the bondage of sin. Even with that knowledge, we often live as though there are still barriers that keep us from being the forgiven and freed people of God. In this section, we will look at barriers to resurrection life and how we as a Christian community help the barriers to stay in place—or help others to overcome the barriers.

GATHERING TIME

There can be many barriers keeping someone from fully experiencing and believing in the resurrection life that is possible through Jesus. (See “Come as You Are,” p. 5.) The group leader should give you a rock to paint or an index card to write on. On the top write the word FREE. On the bottom write a one- or two-word description of what keeps you from being free in Christ; that keeps you from believing you are free. Keep it someplace that is special for you with the FREE side up. It will remind you of what keeps you from living free—and of the resurrection life you have in Jesus Christ.

HISTORICAL READING

READ MARK 16:1-8. This is a written record of an oral report of what happened after the crucifixion of Jesus. It is the story of some of Jesus’ disciples going to take care of his body after his death. These disciples were women who followed Jesus. (See the box on the word *disciple* in the next column.)

dis-ci-ple

1. a follower of the doctrines of a teacher or a school of thought
 - a. One who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another.
 - b. An active adherent, as of a movement or philosophy.
2. often Disciple: One of the original followers of Jesus.

This is not a report of what happened with the 12 apostles, but rather a report of a group of women, going about the business of what women did in that time and place in history. They had observed the Sabbath and now were heading out to anoint the body of Jesus. They were coming to complete the burial tasks for Jesus. These are women who knew Jesus well. We’ve all heard of Mary Magdalene, known to be a devoted follower of Jesus, although never mentioned as part of the 12 apostles. The other two were Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, whom tradition names as the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John.

The witness of these women of faith is that they did not let a barrier keep them from experiencing the resurrection. They started out on their task, talking among themselves about the difficulty of having a big boulder block the entrance to the tomb. Remember that Joseph of Arimathea, the owner of the tomb, sealed the entrance to make sure no one would tamper with the body of Jesus. Even though the difficulty was present, Mary, Mary, and Salome did not let it stop them. And their reward was great! They became, in the Gospel of Mark, the first witnesses to reality of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

But their courage was temporary. After hearing about the resurrection of Jesus, they are, it says in the Gospel, seized by terror and amazement. They run away and they say nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

Their terror and amazement kept them from being able to tell the story, from being able to live out the resurrection story. Perhaps their status as females in their culture became a barrier to them being able to tell the good news—after all, would those 12 male apostles believe them? Perhaps something so amazing, so divine was just too much for their brains and their common sense to comprehend. (See “Living an Easter Life,” p. 16.)

1. What are the obstacles for the women to seeing and believing the resurrection of Jesus in the story?
2. What kept them from telling the story?
3. Imagine you lived at that time and followed Jesus the way Mary, Mary, and Salome did, that you heard his message and experienced his presence. What would your response to the empty tomb have been?
4. What is your response today? Are there things that keep you from being able to fully experience the joy and promise of Jesus’ resurrection and the forgiveness of all your sins?
5. If you are comfortable, in small groups share the word or phrase you wrote on the back of your rock or card. Tell one of the things that keep you from being able to fully live a resurrection life.

LITERARY READING

As we said earlier, the story of Mary, Mary, and Salome was most likely an oral history of what happened right after Jesus was crucified on the cross. The story would have been told to Christians (scholars believe Christians outside Palestine where the majority of Jesus’ ministry took place). Mark, the writer of the Gospel, wrote down the reports of Jesus’ life and ministry.

This story of the women at the tomb is the good news at the end of a long and painful crucifixion. It has been a very sad time. The passage where Mary,

Mary, and Salome come to the tomb carries the heaviness of the crucifixion, which they watched. It quickly becomes a story with a happy ending, at least it seems that way for a bit. However, it is a happy ending with definite twist! (See “Resurrection Reminder,” p. 20.)

The Gospel of Mark ends with the words from Mark 16:8, “So they went out and fled from the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” So the good news of Jesus’ resurrection as told them by the young man—the happy ending, so to speak—becomes an occasion for fear and fleeing and silence.

Background information

Some scholars believe the original writing by Mark ends at verse 8. There are two more endings that come in the Bible after verse 8. It is believed that the additional verses (the shorter ending of Mark which comes right after chapter 16 verse 8) or the longer ending (chapter 16, verses 9–20) were added later. Remember that the Gospel of Mark comes out of oral tradition. As stories are told, certain parts of the story were remembered more strongly or held to be more important. It is possible that the original writer was reporting verses 1–8 and others corrected him by reminding him of other parts of the story following the resurrection. This does not in any way make the gospel reporting less or not accurate, it is what part of the story jumps out and sticks with the people who lived it.

If possible, divide into groups of three or four.

6. What are some other happy-ending stories from the Bible? Have one person in your group pick the story and tell it in their own words to the group.

7. How is the happy ending of the story you remembered different than the happy ending in Mark 16:1–8? What's happy about the ending of Mark 16:1–8, what's not happy? Is *happy* the right word or would you choose a different word?
8. What questions come up in your mind, after hearing the story from Mark 16:1–8? The questions might be a key to show that Mark 16:1–8 is a bit different than other happy-ending stories, which usually end with a neatly tied-up finish.

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL READING

The women who came to the tomb that day, ran away and told no one because they were afraid. That is what verse 8 of the last chapter of Mark says. Earlier we said something about the other endings of Mark. As Lutherans, the way we learn more from our readings is to look at other Bible text, literature, theology, and tradition to see what we can learn. The question for us in the Gospel of Mark might be what we can learn about the barriers to resurrection from all the endings of Mark.

We've looked extensively at verses 1–8, what scholars believe to be the original ending. Let's look at the other two endings to see what they have to say about resurrection.

The church, the community of believers, can be a community where the barriers to resurrection life are named and addressed. Or church, the community of believers, can be a place where people always put on a good face and keep the difficulties of life hidden. Hear what theologian and ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr wrote in *Christianity and Crisis* (February 4, 1941):

Christian peace is ... the peace of waters which have left the placid quiet of an upland lake and pour tumultuously through the perils and surprises of the river bed, but which have the security of their chan-

nel and the certainty of their goal ... A peace from which all awareness of life's tragic sense is excluded is not a Christian's peace."

9. What does Niebuhr's quote have to say to your church or your Bible study group?
10. What do you think about his take on Christian peace as a place where tragic and difficult situations are faced and acknowledged? How does that work in the church, the body of Christ? (See "Nothing Can Separate Us," p. 12.)

Today's Resurrection Barriers

Keep in mind Niebuhr's quote and the story of the women at the tomb in Mark. Now we'll contrast those with stories behind the voices of women from our time.

Terror and amazement kept the women at the tomb from recognizing the joy of the resurrection of Jesus. As Christians, we often have things in our lives that can keep us from living in the joy of faith in the risen Christ. (See "Outside the Tomb," p. 22.)

Here are the voices of some who have experienced barriers to their own participation in the resurrection of Jesus, the joy and forgiveness of a life lived in faith and amazement:

"I was raised to know that there were things I needed to do in order to be worthy of the love of God. The thing is, I feel like it is never enough. I know I need to be better and I know I can never get it right enough for God."

"I've recently been divorced. I'm not sure what went wrong, I just know that now we are apart. I know what the Bible says about divorce. I wonder sometimes if I will ever feel forgiven again."

"My partner hits me. It's always done so no one can see the bruises. I'm afraid to disagree with anything they say."

I've been to talk to pastors in the past and some of them have told me that I just need to forgive. I don't know what I'm doing to bring this on. I don't know where to go for help."

"We are financially broke. I'm so anxious about it. It is all I can think about. I'm glad Jesus died for my sins but I can't stop worrying about money and our future."

"I'm just so overweight that I feel embarrassed about myself. I feel like it is all my fault. What can the church offer to me, besides coffee hour and potlucks? It is certainly not something I can talk about here."

11. How does the good news of Jesus' resurrection speak to these situations?
12. How can and does the church support people in situations like these? What are some ways the church has not been helpful in these situations?
13. What can you and your women's group do to be a resurrection community for people who think the obstacles of their lives make resurrection living impossible? How can your congregation be a resurrection community?

Going Deeper Action Steps

You may want to pick one of these barriers to resurrection as a project that your group can work on. In addition to using the Going Deeper starter resource list at right, check out the Women of the ELCA Web site at www.womenoftheelca.org for resources that can help you with this. Here are three resources that can be downloaded from that Web site. They are "Called to Deal with Difficult Issues: A Challenging Ministry," "Stand Up for Justice," and "Who? Me? Women of Faith Making a Difference."

There are also resources for the issues about violence discussed in this session at the Justice for

Women Web site of the ELCA (www.elca.org/justiceforwomen under the "sexism and patriarchy" tab) and for issues about finances on Thrivent Financial's Web site (www.thrivent.com).

CLOSING

Now is our opportunity to share our barriers to resurrection living with the group, if you are comfortable doing so. If you are not ready to share, that is fine. If there is a barrier you need help with, please seek help from one of the resources listed in this study or from someone in your community.

STARTER RESOURCE LIST

Resources for Domestic Violence

What should I do if I believe I am victim?

- Trust your instincts. Seek help.
- The abuse is not your fault.
- You are not alone. Help is available.
- Talk in confidence with someone you trust: a relative, a friend, or your pastor.
- Set up a safety plan of action for yourself and your children (such as hide a car key and money in a safe place; locate somewhere to go in case of emergency).

National Domestic Violence Hotline 888-799-SAFE

Resources for Financial Difficulties

Many financial businesses and organizations offer workshops and advice on finances at little or no cost. Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is one of those. Women of the ELCA also has resource on the Web site. And check out Land Grant University County and State

ONG (Select one)

Now Behold the Lamb"

ELW 341

Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"

ELW 332, *LBW* 497

Take O Take Me as I Am"

ELW 814, *TFF* 128

PRAYER

God, you are a resurrection God. You came to us through your Son Jesus, bringing hope and life to a world that was full of barriers. Help us to keep glimpsing that hope and life, even as we encounter barriers to our resurrection faith. In those days when we get a clear vision of resurrection life, help us to bask in that vision and hold on to it for another day. Remind us that there is nothing in all of creation, nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our

Extension Organizations in your area (using an Internet search) where you can find research presented in workshop format or informational pamphlets and booklets on financial information.

Wellness, Health, Nutrition, and Exercise

Check out Community Education or Land Grant University Extension resources in your area for Health, Wellness, and Nutrition information as well as financial information.

County Health Departments sometimes offer various resources in this area.

The ELCA Board of Pensions has information on health and wellness on its Web site at www.elcabop.org under "the healthy leaders initiative" tab. Included there is the Wellness Wheel, a visual reminder of the need for balance to have a healthy, barrier-free life. The Wellness Wheel (see graphic) reminds us of the need for balance in the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical, vocational, and financial parts of our lives. When one or two of them get out of whack, our lives get out of whack.

Lord. There, we said it. We claim it, in the name of Jesus. Help us to believe it, Lord! Amen.

LOOKING AHEAD

The body of Christ is called into the world to tell the good news of Jesus Christ. How that is done sometimes divides the body of Christ. Tune in next month for stimulating thoughts on just how to tell the good news—how to be an evangelist in today's world. 🌿

The Rev. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo, M.S., and the Rev. Jensen Seyenkulo, Ph.D., live in the Chicago area. Linda is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Park Forest, Ill., and Jensen is former director for rostered and authorized leadership in the ELCA Vocation and Education unit.



Resources for Counseling and Pastoral Care

Your pastor is a good place to start for personal or family counseling. Even if that is not his or her special skill, they can make recommendations to you of area people who can serve as resources.

Your doctor may be able to recommend a counselor for family or individual counseling.

Check out your community to find out what kind of mental health and/or counseling services are available.



Bossy, worried, and ready to change

by Anne Basye

any years ago, my journalist/pseudonym ex-husband wrote a ballad about me titled "Let's get together and worry about it." He later performed it at a Chicago music venue called the Earl of Old Town, now defunct.

Except for the couplet "Vietnam, the Shah of Iran," I've forgotten his lyrical list of things that preoccupied me. I do remember feeling a mix of pleasure and shame that my worry-wart tendencies were now so publicly immortalized.

My tendency to feel responsible for the whole world began early. As a second-grader, I would touch next to my youngest brother's bassinet to make sure he was breathing. While everybody else was smiling at the camera in the Christmas card photos, my head was slightly turned to keep an eye on the others.

Nobody ever *told* me this was my job. It just happened one

October day in 1958, when my parents brought my sister home from the hospital. Suddenly I was the junior assistant, the go-to child. That experience came back to me once as I babysat for friends with a new baby. Hands busy with infant Samuel, I sent little Sara, 22 months, on errand after errand: Please fetch the diaper bag. Can you hand me that bottle? Each time she toddled off obediently, a shock of recognition and solidarity ran through me.

There are upsides to being the oldest daughter. You're first in everything: first to sleep over at a friend's house, first to go to high school, first to drive. First to go to college, to get a job, to marry, to be a parent. Some of those firsts are traumatic, like divorcing. And every first is a struggle. Migrating birds take turns heading up the V formation. Not so the oldest daughter, sentenced by birth order to stay at its head!

The oldest daughter is also an expert on her parents. Because you've known your parents longest, you can clue your siblings into how to meet their hopes and expectations.

The shadow side, of course, is becoming the Compliance Director, the pint-sized enforcer of the parental ethos. Constantly set up to be the good child, you're not quite trusted by the others. They know that under the gun, you may throw in with the adults instead of your peers.

My first year in college, 700 miles north, I tacked photos above my dorm room bed: My sister on a YMCA ski trip. My brother flying over the river levee on his banana-seat bike. The youngest one, whose breathing I watched so vigilantly, grinning winsomely. As I grew accustomed to independence—something else that comes naturally to firstborns—I missed them less and less.

Fast forward to 2010. After a 30-year run as the “guest star” sister who lived, worked, traveled, and parented in a big city two time zones away, I came back to live near the family fold. Those decades away should count for something, I figured. Surely my adult resume had inoculated me against worry, bossiness, and anxious meddling. Wrong.

The tomb of being right

“We do not see the world as it is, but as we are,” the writer Anais Nin allegedly remarked.

No wonder, then, that stepping back into my brothers’ and sister’s lives, I reverted to my earlier view of them as a collection of siblings it was my job to counsel. From there it was a small step to embrace a middle-aged version of old childhood patterns.

For instance, “I did it first and I did it best.” Not only is my child grown up, he’s in graduate school! Not only was my house tidy, I sold it at a tidy profit! Not only was my budget balanced, I saved money! You’d be happier/more successful/a better parent if you’d do it *my* way.

Or “Do it differently.” Stick to my recipe for life, after I show you how to change a few ingredients and brush up critical relationship techniques, since I was first in marriage but best in divorce.

Or “One ringy-dingy, two ringy-dingy.” Resuming my role at

the family switchboard, interpreting one generation to the other and relaying—or censoring—messages between them.

Or what I call “*Duktiga flicka* syndrome.” That’s Swedish for “clever girl,” and that was me: oldest daughter and *good* daughter, who left the acting out to others. Not long ago, my sister—a real handful in her teens—asked me, “Could you be the good one so I can be the bad one again?”

The good one: still hovering by her brother’s bassinet, almost 50 years later. Stuck.

Twelve steps to resurrection

Annoyed that no one seemed to notice or do anything about the sibling who struggles with drinking, I decided to go to Al-Anon to find out how to help.

That first meeting was an eye opener. A heart opener, too, as I listened to spouses and parents talk about their beloved alcoholics. I’m new to the 12-step party; its language does not roll off my tongue. But I started to see that while I had a pretty good grasp of boundaries at work, in friendships, and with my son, things weren’t so clear among the people I grew up with.

No wonder I had moved so far away! Distance was the tool I chose to manage family boundaries; in the same time zone and area code, it was no longer helpful.

Admonishing, advising, exhorting—rhetorical tools of the oldest sister—don’t work either, I learned. Alcoholics, the thinking goes, are the only ones who can decide to quit drinking. Until they realize that they are “sick and tired of being sick and tired” (as a famous AA phrase says), well-meaning people like me can’t convince them. Talking on someone else’s problem—for example, intervening to protect them from consequences of their actions—only prevents them from hitting bottom and, perhaps, deciding to change their lives.

Most of all, worrying and obsessing about this doesn’t help anyone. Not me. Not my parents. Not my siblings. Hello, Jesus! I guess I wasn’t listening when you said, in Matthew, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

This was very, very hard for me to take in. But it was also very freeing. Al-Anon showed me that my relationship with my siblings and parents needed updating. We are not children anymore. “Sibling Wrangler” is not in my job description. And it’s not like any of my siblings *want* me to worry about them—or even want my advice.

My siblings are my team. Because we started life together, we see many things the same way. We’ve shared some difficult chapters, and more lie ahead. As the oldest

t sister, it's my role to accompany my siblings while respecting their autonomy, decisions, and paths. Somehow, I need to figure out how to stay close and connected without feeling over-responsible and trampling on their turf.

the global oldest sister

Confronting my Inner Oldest Sister, I realized that when it comes to global mission, my struggle is my struggle: Convinced we know better; offering advice that hasn't been asked for; noticing flaws and shortcomings instead of lifting up strengths; projecting sometimes our own troublesome issues onto others—that's me. It also sounds like many North Americans engaged in global mission.

Like me, Lutherans seem way overdue in acknowledging that our global siblings are adults. Our talk of our companion churches and communities sounds respectful, but our in-house language betrays us. Recently I was part of a global mission workshop whose participants were discussing how to share resources and decision making with their mission companions.

How interesting to hear people talk about "letting them be involved" or "allowing them to share their gifts with us." *Allowing*—a verb used by people in charge. Like oldest sisters—and oldest sister church bodies!

Here's another example. Coming from a family that was quicker to correct than praise, I see my siblings' flaws more easily than their gifts and talents. When I wrote for the ELCA Global Mission Unit, I knew I was supposed to lift up the assets of companion churches. And I did—but first I presented their needs.

And no wonder. Needs grab us by the throat and open our wallets. Strengths don't, perhaps because we believe that strong people don't need—or deserve—help. But finally, describing how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe was addressing its country's daunting political and economic problems, I thought: Let me give it a try. Let me lead with the amazing strength of people who persist through days in which a loaf of bread may double in price between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m., and *then* I'll paint the problem.

Is there an Al-Anon for Christians in mission, I wonder? An intervention that helps us respect boundaries? Acknowledge when a problem is someone else's business? Listen before recommending? Train ourselves to see first how capable our companions are, and then ask, humbly, how best to support those talents? Teach us how to be responsible *to* our companions instead of, like me, feeling inappropriately (maybe even delusionally) responsible *for* them? A program for turning us global oldest sisters into

real companions, who can recognize and admit our own problems and share our vulnerability along with our cash?

Rolling away the stone

As Christians, we don't have to stand vigil over the bassinet to make sure our brothers and sisters are breathing.

Like my siblings, our global partners want our friendship and support—but not if we stick to an outdated model of oldest sisterhood. Personally, I want to enjoy life among my siblings. I don't want them to run when they see me or let my calls go to voice mail because they think I'm checking up on them.

"We can make it a spiritual practice not to criticize others' behavior, not to interpret what they do according to our worldview, and not to advise unless we are invited to do so," writes David Richo, a personal—and spiritual—growth therapist and author.

How I pray to learn and live this wisdom! Humbly practicing these steps, I hope, will help me put over-responsibility behind me once and for all, and let me learn a new dance with my siblings, a dance of appreciation, affection, and trust. 🌸

Anne Basye has been a daughter for 54 years, an oldest sister for 52 years, and a mother for 23 years. She lives and writes in the Northwest.



HEALTH WISE

Equal Health For All

by Molly M. Ginty

Some are dying of preventable problems including heart failure, diabetes, and lung cancer.

Minorities in the United States have more health woes than whites, and can be up to six times more likely to develop major diseases. But during April, which is National Minority Health Awareness Month, grassroots initiatives, health-care reform legislation, and the new National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities are all working to end this injustice. "We need to improve medical care for people of color," says Eleanor Hinton Hoytt, president of the Black Women's Health Imperative, an advocacy group. "But most importantly, we need to address the underlying problems that are negatively affecting their health: insufficient exercise, fast food, low wages, high stress, and pervasive racism."

Both the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) track health outcomes by ethnicity. And both report that Native Americans are more likely than people of other races to suffer health problems, faring worse in every realm from infant mortality to HIV diagnosis. Next in line are African Americans, who are twice as likely as whites to have heart attacks and to be obese.

Next come Latinos, who are nearly twice as likely as whites to go without health insurance and to develop liver disease. And Asians, while faring the best for some health indicators, nevertheless, lag behind in many and are more likely than people of other races to skip

gynecological checkups and to contract tuberculosis.

Why are health outcomes for people of color so much poorer than those for whites? Scientists say biological differences aren't actually to blame. We may categorize people by race based on outward differences such as skin color. But across racial lines, humans actually share 99.9 percent of their DNA, report researchers from the Human Genome Project. Within races, genetic differences can actually be more pronounced than they are between them. Thus, a Latina from Chicago and a Latina from Cuba may have less DNA in common than the Chicago woman and an Asian woman who lives in faraway China.

If health disparities don't stem from genetic differences, what could be the root cause? Research points to racism, poverty and stress—all proven by scientific studies to have a negative impact on human health.

Consider how these three forces have affected Native Americans. Numbered at an estimated 100 million in 1492 (when Christopher Columbus first landed in the New World), Native Americans numbered just 4.5 million. Their population has been decimated by their forcible removal from their native lands, and the diseases with which white settlers infected them.

Because they have the highest poverty rate in the U.S. (according to the Census Bureau); and because they are the ethnic group most likely to suffer frequent mental stress (according to o-

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

Harvard study), Native Americans have racism, income, and stress all stacked against them. "These social factors are likely the reason that Native Americans' health outcomes measure the worst," says Hinton Hoytt.

Like social factors, barriers to health care access also contribute to disparities. Consider the case of black women. Only 75 percent of African American mothers receive prenatal care, compared 89 percent of white mothers.

Only 7 percent of black women with depression get treatment, versus 90 percent of depressed patients overall. Black women are twice as likely as white women to delay screening for breast cancer. And these disparities (which are themselves fueled by racism, poverty, and stress) mean black women are more likely than other women to have preterm babies, to suffer depression, and to die of late-stage breast cancer.

The good news? Both grassroots activists and government agencies are battling to end racial disparities. To help African American women avoid preterm births, for instance, the U.S. Office of Minority Health is running "A Healthy Baby Begins with You," a program that promotes better prenatal nutrition and health screenings. The Boston Health Commission is spearheading a "Pink and Black Campaign" to boost breast-cancer screening among black women in Boston. And the African American sorority Delta Sigma Theta is running "Clinical Depression Education Campaign" nationwide.

Many reform efforts are aimed not just at individual health problems and individual ethnicities, but at racial disparities as a whole. Since the Department of Health and Human Services opened its Office of Minority Health in 1985, federal campaigns that address overall discrepancies have included the Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health (launched in 1998); Healthy People 2010 (launched in 2000), and Healthy People 2020 (launched this year).

Now bolstering these efforts is the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, which boosts funding to community health centers that serve minorities and which aims to put health insurance within the reach of those who could not afford it.

In addition to improving health access for people of color, the health-reform bill also establishes the new National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), formerly a smaller center within the NIH. This new institute will devote unprecedented effort and funding toward addressing health disparities.

"We've made some progress towards our goal, yet there is much unfinished business," says Dr. John Ruffin, NIMHD director. "We now have to re-examine our strategy and to accelerate the pace through innovative, sustainable, and results-oriented approaches." 🌿

Molly Ginty (<http://mollymaureenginty.wordpress.com>) lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Women's eNews*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Ms*.

For more information:

National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities
<http://ncmhd.nih.gov>

U.S. Office of Minority Health
www.raceandhealth.hhs.gov

Black Women's Health Imperative
www.blackwomenshealth.org

Kaiser Family Foundation
"Monthly Update on Health Disparities"
www.kff.org/minorityhealth/report_archives.cfm

American Medical Association
"Ending Disparities e-Letter"
www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/public-health/eliminating-health-disparities/ending-disparities-eletter.shtml

Eighth Triennial Convention



- Notice is hereby given that the Eighth Triennial Convention of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will be held in Spokane, Washington, at the Spokane Convention Center, July 12–July 14, 2011.
- Delegate credentialing will begin at 7 p.m. (PDT) on Monday, July 11. Delegate orientation will be held at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, July 12, 2011.
- The convention will open and close with worship. The opening worship service will begin at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, July 12. The closing worship service will conclude at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 14.
- All are encouraged to attend triennial convention plenary sessions where the business of the organization will be conducted.
- All are also encouraged to attend Renew, Respond, Rejoice!, the Women of the ELCA gathering which will follow the convention. Opening session for the gathering is on Thursday, July 14, at 7 p.m. Closing worship for the gathering is scheduled for Saturday evening, July 16, following a 7 p.m. presentation by Charlotte, N.C., the host city for the 2014 convention and gathering.

Betty Brandt, secretary

*Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
churchwide executive board*



RACE NOTES

Worthwhile Investment

Linda Post Bushkofsky



I met a woman at a Women of the ELCA event recently. We got to talking about my work and the upcoming triennial gathering. She knew women who had attended a gathering in the past, but she herself had not been to one. In sharing that I have attended every one, I mentioned that I had gone to the 1990 triennial as a young woman scholarship recipient. “Well,” she replied, “we sure did get a good return on that investment, didn’t we?”

As I later reflected on her remark, I thought about its truth. Over the last 20 years, Women of the ELCA has invested a lot in me. At that first triennial in 1990, I didn’t know much about Women of the ELCA, but I distinctly remember leaving Anaheim, Calif., thinking, “If this is what the women’s organization is all about, count me in!”

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synodical Women’s Organization invested in me, electing me to the synodical board shortly after that first triennial. I was just 31, and I needed to learn from the more experienced members of the board. They were patient with me and allowed me to spread my wings as the peace with justice coordinator for our SWO. My first experience with event planning was as a board member as we coordinated SWO conventions and planned mission trips.

The churchwide organization invested in me through leadership training events in the 1990s. Each event taught me new skills, broadened my horizons and increased my commitment. All the while, I was responding to these invest-

ments. I was a delegate to SWO conventions and to the 1993 triennial convention. I led my local congregational unit. I volunteered at the 1996 and 1999 triennial conventions, working behind the scenes in video production. I wrote the Thankoffering service in 1997. I had several articles published in this magazine, and became a regular columnist for several years. And in 2002 I took what I’ve often described as “the opportunity of a lifetime” and became the organization’s executive director.

I’m not offering up this biography to brag. Instead, I’d like you to reflect on what a difference that initial scholarship investment made in my life and in the life of this organization. That investment payoff has been experienced time and time again in this organization. Another scholarship recipient from the 1990 triennial served her synodical board and is an active leader in our anti-racism network. Another was active in her SWO and served on the churchwide executive board. Many synodical presidents have served the church as synod vice presidents or on the ELCA Church Council.

Some scholarship recipients have gone on to serve the church as pastors. And several participants in Women of the ELCA have served on the ELCA churchwide staff.

The women we invest in today will serve and lead this organization and the church into the future. Who will you send to the triennial gathering? 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.

Eighth Triennial Gathering is

14–17 in Spokane, Wash. To find more, visit www.womenoftheelca.org/triennial1.



AMEN!

Abundant Life

by Catherine Malotky

God, I came of age in a heady time. This nation was top dog. The world wars were over. It seemed like everything could finally get back to normal. People flocked to church, moved to the suburbs, relished a career, and had perfect families. At least, that's what we all thought.

At least, that's what we all *needed* to think. Because we lost a lot in those wars, even if we did win. Too many empty places at too many family tables haunted us year after year. Too many permanently damaged soldiers struggling among us. And we wanted to think the wars that followed were just long skirmishes, but they were not. They brought even more deaths of good soldiers, even more wounded, even more internal conflict about sending our children off. When we did well, we honored these sacrifices, as well we should. But the empty places remain: futures, dreams, and hopes lost or damaged for good.

So we bucked up, God. As a culture we set about to create a world that would make it right again. We said how things should be. Dad at work, Mom at home, kids "above average." And that didn't seem to work. Dads lost their jobs; Moms sometimes needed to be places other than home; and kids can have troubles. Families break under the strain, people with different ideas of what "should be" show up and start confusing everyone.

This is when all our "shoulds" get us into trouble. *You* know, God, that life is messy and complicated and unpredict-

able. We really can't force it into something other than that. When we assume it can be tidy and a matter of our own will, we might just be leaving you out of the equation, God. We might just be assuming we can do it all on our own and that is unbelief when you get right down to it.

Our well-meaning eagerness to get past our grief and confusion is a matter of our desire for your will, God. We yearn for abundant life, as do you. But we too often think *abundant* means *perfect*. Unfortunately, one person's drive toward abundance might very well damage another—and usually does.

How are we to live in this messiness, God? How are we to understand a good life, a faithful life, and have peace?

Perhaps there is not an easy answer, God. Perhaps, in your wisdom, this is where we might turn to each other and learn, as the body of Christ, what it might mean to roll away the stone that stands in front of us.

I believe, God, that you offer us a life of resurrection, a life where even death, large or small, is being redeemed. Perhaps together we might learn to share and name that redemption at work, and celebrate *your* faithfulness rather than worrying about ours.

God, give us the courage to face the messiness of our lives head on. Together teach us to see your redeeming work in every nook and cranny. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky is an ordained ELCA pastor. She has served in parish ministry and as an editor, teacher, and retreat leader.

Lynette Iglehart of Edison Park Lutheran Church, Chicago, Ill., wraps Easter "lamb" cakes that the church sells. The proceeds are donated to missions. The women's group has also contributed more than 3,000 quilts to Lutheran World Relief in the past 25 years. They make prayer shawls for the sick and grieving, and table runners, baby quilts, crafts, stuffed toys, and holiday decorations that are sold in November at a church bazaar. "Believing that we are the hands of Christ, the women of Edison Park Lutheran Church are very busy," writes Sheri Sears, who submitted the photo and information.

BEING THE HANDS OF CHRIST



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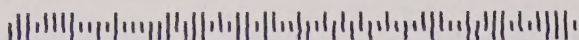
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